

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL ASMARA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRESS ARTICLE ON ERITREA

REF: ADDIS 1753

FOR POSTS INFO ONLY, FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF ARTICLE APPEARING
IN WASHINGTON POST, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1975, WRITTEN BY
DIAL TORGENSON.

QUOTE: CIVILIAN SLAUGHTER IN ASMARA REVEALED
(BOLD TYPE) ETHIOPIAN FORCE MASSACRED HUNDREDS
(ITALICS) THE WRITER WAS DETAINED FOR SIX HOURS WEDNESDAY
ON RETURN TO ADDIS ABABA FROM COVERING THE REBELLION IN
ERITREA PROVINCE. HE LEFT THE COUNTRY TO FILE THIS DIS-
PATCH
BY DIAL TORGENSON, LOS ANGELES TIMES

ASMARA, ETHIOPIA - GOVERNMENT TROOPS HAVE KILLED HUNDREDS
OF CIVILIANS IN WILD BLOODLETTING AND LOOTING IN REBEL-
LIUS ERITREA PROVINCE.

THE FIRST REPORTERS TO REACH THIS CITY - WITHOUT PERMISSION
FROM THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT - SINCE FIGHTING BROKE OUT TWO
WEEKS AGO TALLIED 331 KNOWN DEAD. A DIPLOMATIC OFFICIAL
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ESTIMATED 500 SLAIN. A CATHOLIC AGENCY SAID THAT INCLUDING THOSE KILLED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE 3,000 MAY HAVE DIED.

HOSPITALS HERE ARE CROWDED WITH SURVIVORS, SOME MUTILATED, MANY CRIPPLED. THOUSANDS OF RESIDENTS ARE FLEEING THE BULLET-SCARRED CITY, FEARING FURTHER VIOLENCE.

THE KILLING BEGAN AFTER GUERRILLAS FIGHTING FOR ERITREAN INDEPENDENCE ATTACKED MANY TROOPS HERE WITH ROCKETS, MORTARS AND AUTOMATIC WEAPONS.

THE GUERRILLAS HIT AND RAN. BUT TROOPS OF TWO DIVISIONS SENT HERE FROM THE CAPITAL AT ADDIS ABABA, 450 MILES AWAY, RAN WILD FOR FOUR DAYS, SHOOTING CIVILIANS IN CARS, ON STREETS AND IN THEIR HOMES.

A GOVERNMENT MEDICAL SOURCE SAID SOLDIERS SHOT TO DEATH 100 VILLAGERS WHO HAD GATHERED IN A COPTIC CHURCH OUTSIDE OF ASMARA. A SURVIVOR TOLD THIS REPORTER:

" THE PRIEST HELD UP THE CROSS AND BEGGED MERCY IN THE NAME OF GOD. THEN THEY STARTED FIRING."

SOME DISCIPLINE WAS IMPOSED ON THE SOLDIERS EARLY LAST WEEK. CIVILIAN KILLINGS HAVE BEEN FEW SINCE THEN. GUERRILLAS OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION FRONT HAVE RETURNED TO STRIKE AT NIGHT AT GOVERNMENT INSTALLATIONS, AND FIGHTING CONTINUES ALONG THE ROADS AND IN THE HILLS AROUND ASMARA.

DURING THE SLAUGHTER, THE SOLDIERS BROKE INTO HOMES, LOOTING THEM, THEN KILLING THE RESIDENTS. THEY SACKED SHOPS AND MACHINE-GUNNED PASSING CARS, SEEMINGLY BY WHIM. A DOCTOR SAID HE HAD TREATED MANY WOMEN WHOSE EARLOBES HAD

BEEN HACKED OFF WITH BAYONETS BY SOLDIERS STEALING EARRINGS.

THE WORST MASSACRE WAS AT THE VILLAGE OF WOKI DEBA, FOUR MILES NORTHWEST OF ASMARA. GOVERNMENT SOLDIERS WERE TURNED BACK BY AN AMBUSH BEYOND WOKI DEBA. THEY ACCUSED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VILLAGERS OF HELPING THE GUERRILLAS. THE SOLDIERS ORDERED EVERYONE IN THE VILLAGE TO A CHURCH.

"WE THOUGHT THAT THEY (THE GOVERNMENT TROOPS) WERE CHRISTIANS, AND THAT IF WE GATHERED IN THE CHURCH THEY WOULDN'T KILL US " SAID SEBREHAT LEAB, 58, A FARMER, IN AN ASMARA HOSPITAL. "THEY KILLED US ANYWAY."

SEBREHAT SAID THE TROOPS CALLED THE VILLAGERS OUT INTO THE COMPOUND YARD. "KESHI KIFLE YESE, THE PRIEST, HELD UP THE CROSS AND BEGGED MERCY IN THE NAME OF GOD," SEBREHAT SAID. "THE PEOPLE CRIED FOR MERCY. THEN THEY STARTED FIRING."

THE FARMER'S RIGHT ARM WAS HIT AND HE FELL BENEATH A HEAP OF BODIES. LATER, HE FORCED HIS WAY OUT, SPENT THE NIGHT IN A FIELD AND WALKED TO AN ASMARA HOSPITAL WHERE HIS INJURED ARM WAS AMPUTATED BELOW THE ELBOW.

HE SAID HE WAS SHOT IN A GROUP OF ABOUT 50 VILLAGERS. A SECOND SURVIVOR, HIT IN THE BACK, SAID THAT THOSE MASSACRED INCLUDED FOUR PRIESTS, AS WELL AS WOMEN AND CHILDREN. SOME OF THE HOMES, INCLUDING SEBREHAT'S, WERE BURNED BY THE TROOPS.

A MEDICAL OFFICIAL WHO IS AN ERITREAN SAID THAT POLICE COMMANDOS TOLD HIM THAT THEY BURIED 77 BODIES AND THAT VILLAGERS BURIED 23 MORE. THE COMMANDOS ARE ERITREANS AND TOOK NO PART IN THE SLAUGHTER. THEY HELPED CIVILIANS WHERE THEY COULD.

THE MEN OF THE 2D DIVISION WHICH HAS BEEN FIGHTING REBELS HERE FOR YEARS, ARE MOSTLY AMHARA TRIBE MEMBERS, FROM ADDIS ABABA AS ARE MEN OF THE 1ST DIVISION, WHO SERVED FORMER EMPEROR HAILE SEALSSIE AS HIS BODYGUARD.

THE GOVERNMENT IS IN THE HANDS OF THE POWERFUL AMHARA, WHO ARE CHRISTIANS AND NUMBER ABOUT A THIRD OF THE POPULATION OF ETHIOPIA. ERITREANS, WHO ARE GENERALLY MOSLEM, MAINLY HAVE LOW-LEVEL POSITIONS IN THE PROVINCE.

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EACH ETHNIC GROUP DISDAINS THE OTHER. DECADES OF BAD BLOOD FOUND AN OUTLET IN THE FOUR DAYS OF KILLING FROM JAN. 31 TO FEB. 3.

IN AN APPARENT ATTEMPT TO KEEP NEWS OF THE KILLINGS FROM REACHING THE OUTSIDE WORLD, THE ADDIS ABABA GOVERNMENT DENIED REQUESTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS TO GO THERE.

FOREIGNERS EVACUATED BY AIR WERE TOLD BY THEIR CONSULATES NOT TO TALK TO JOURNALISTS FOR FEAR OF REPRISALS ON RELATIVES WHO STAYED BEHIND.

I DROVE INTO ASMARA MONDAY WITH THREE OTHER JOURNALISTS,

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A LULL IN FIGHTING ALONG THE ROADWAY SOUTH OF HERE. FIELD TROOPS WAVED US PAST, UNAWARE OF THE CAPITAL'S NEWS BLACKOUT.

IT WAS THE STINGING ATTACKS OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION FRONT THAT TRIGGERED THE ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS. "WILD, UNDISCIPLINED FIRING BY UNCONTROLLED TROOPS CAUSED MOST OF THE CASUALTIES," A DIPLOMATIC SOURCE SAID.

AFTER ONE REBEL ATTACK, THE TROOPS RAN AMOK IN ASMARA. BULLET HOLES ALONG THE MAIN STREETS SHOW WHERE THEY DROVE THROUGH THE CITY, RAKING STORE WINDOWS AND HALLS WITH MACHINE-GUN FIRE.

CARLO CIPOLINI, 23, AN ITALIAN NATIONAL, WAS DRIVING PAST THE NYALA HOTEL, ASMARA'S BIGGEST. SOLDIERS RIDDLED HIS CAR WITH AUTOMATIC WEAPONS. HE WAS HIT IN THE LEG AND LUNG BUT SURVIVED TO BE AIRLIFTED TO ADDIS ABABA FOR FURTHER TREATMENT.

ASMARA, AN ATTRACTIVE CITY OF 250,000, WAS FOR 50 YEARS THE CAPITAL OF AN ITALIAN COLONY, AND MANY STAYED AFTER ETHIOPIA ANNEXED THE TERRITORY IN 1962 AND THE LONG GUERRILLA STRUGGLE BEGAN. BY THIS WEEK, 2,000 OF THE 2,500 ASMARA ITALIANS HAD BEEN EVACUATED TO ADDIS ABAB, ENROUTE TO ITALY.
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ONE WHO DID NOT MAKE IT WAS CARMELO CARDARO, 45. DURING THE KILLING SPREE, SOLDIERS WERE LOOTING SHOPS AND HOMES. SEVERAL ENTERED CARDARO'S BAKERY SHOP OFF ASMARA'S MAIN STREET AND DEMANDED BREAD.

AS HE BEGAN TO THRUST BREAD TOWARD THEM ONE OF THE SOLDIERS SHOT HIM. HE DIED ON THE FLOOR OF HIS SHOP. HE HAD COME FROM SICILY AS A CHILD AND HAD REARED THREE CHILDREN, NOW 12 THROUGH 20.

WHEN AMMUNITION BEGAN TO RUN OUT, THE SOLDIERS STARTED USING BAYONETS. "WE HAD 50 OR 60 CASES OF KNIFE WOUNDS," SAID A HOSPITAL SUPERVISOR. HIS HOSPITAL HAD ADMITTED 125 WOUNDED AND PLACED 125 DEAD IN ITS MORGUE BY THIS WEEK.

BINIAM SOLOMON, A TINY BOY OF 6, WAS PLAYING HAPPILY THIS WEEK -NAN ASMARA HOSPITAL WITH A MEDICAL PAMPHLET ON LIVER MEDICINE. THE COLORED PICTURES OF LIVERS FASCINATED HIM. BUT HE HAD TO TURN THE PAGES WITH HIS LEFT HAND. HIS RIGHT HAND WAS SHOT OFF FEB. 2 BY ONE OF THE SOLDIERS WHO

WERE KICKING IN THE DOORS OF HOMES IN THE MAI TIMKET
DISTRICT OF ASMARA.

HE WEARS A WHITE BANDAGE ON THE STUMP. HIS DIRTY BROWN
SWEATER IS DECORATED WITH STICKERS FROM MEDICINE AND
SUTURE CONTAINERS STUCK THERE BY NURSES. HE IS BRIGHT
AND QUICK AND REMEMBERS WELL WHAT HAPPENED.

"THE MAN HAD A DARK FACE AND HE WORE BULLETS LIKE THIS,"
HE SAID, FINGERING OUT CARTRIDGES IN AN IMAGINARY BANDOLIER
AROUND HIS WAIST. "HIS FACE WAS MEAN." HE TAPPED THE
WRIST OF A VISITOR WITH HIS REMAINING FOREFINGER.

"HE HURT MY FATHER AND MOTHER. SHE WENT TO SLEEP. WE
COULD NOT WAKE HER UP. SHE IS STILL SLEEPING."

UNQUOTE. INGERSOLL

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